



Representative

Bill Grant

Majority Caucus Chair

Dear Neighbors:

With the 2006 session of the Washington State Legislature at the half-way point, I thought I'd take this opportunity to update you on the progress we are making in areas of importance to us – the people who live on the east side of the Cascades.

Because I know you'd rather spend your precious free time reading to your children or grandchildren than reading a letter from me, I will concentrate on just a few areas:

- **Biofuels** – Washington can lead the nation in the alternative-fuels industry, creating opportunities for farmers, jobs for workers, and a clean domestic fuel supply.
- **Tax relief for farmers** – I am sponsoring bills that will remove the state taxes from the fuel, machinery, and equipment that are vital to Washington's agricultural industry.
- **Education** – We will continue to provide schools the tools they need to assure every student has the chance to succeed, and I am working to bring a public four-year college to our district.
- **Veterans** – We have a duty to honor and serve those who have protected our safety and freedom.
- **Budget** – As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I am working to assure we pass a supplemental budget that sets aside money for the next economic downturn.

However, there are many other issues before the legislature this session. If you ever have a question or comment on any of them, please contact my office.

Sincerely,

Bill Grant

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Committees:

- Appropriations
- Economic Development, Agriculture and Trade
- Rules

Honoring our veterans

I'm proud of our region's tradition of service to our country, and I am supporting a package of reforms that will honor our military people with actions as well as words.

Helmets to Hard Hats – Because people returning from active duty often need help to transition quickly to good jobs in their home communities, I'm proposing that returning service personnel be given priority for admission into state apprenticeship programs that lead to good jobs.

Patriotic Employer Act – No one should lose their civilian job because they served our country. I support a \$500 tax credit to help small businesses hold jobs open for Washington National Guard and other service personnel returning from active duty.

National Guard Active Duty Protection – Last year, we passed financial protections for National Guard members and their families. I hope to extend financial protections to businesses owned by National Guard members. No one who serves in uniform should lose their business as a result of their service.



Rep. Bill Grant

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Biofuel: Supporting local farmers instead of foreign oil companies

Every time you gas up your vehicle, from car to combine, you're sending money out-of-state to giant oil companies.

As a farmer, I know how the price of gas and diesel affects family farms. Whenever prices go up, our profits go down. Every year, citizens pump \$9 billion out of Washington when they fill up their tanks.

I believe we're better off spending more of our money right here, making our economy stronger. Instead of sending our money to the Middle East, we can keep it here in Eastern Washington by having our farmers grow biofuels -- ethanol and biodiesel.

Our region isn't just perfect for growing wheat. It's great for growing canola, which we can plant in rotation. And canola doesn't require irrigation.

So I'm proud to tell you I'm sponsoring the Energy Freedom Fund, a measure that takes the first step toward energy independence.

This legislation uses a tiny percentage from this year's budget surplus to pave the way for our farmers, scientists and businesses to kick-start the biofuels industry. Our economy, and our jobs, shouldn't be at the mercy of foreign oil companies. We can stand on our own.

Tax relief for farmers

I am proud that one of the first bills passed in the House this session was mine -- a measure exempting farmers from the sales tax on diesel fuel. Farmers know all too well what's happened to diesel prices lately. For the first time since the Great Depression, in fact, you pay more for a gallon of fuel than you get for a bushel of wheat. Prices have gone from \$1.50 a gallon not too long ago to more than \$3 a gallon today. Farmers are slammed extra hard because the sales tax on fuel is going up right along with the cost of it. What's more, these soaring prices hit at harvest and planting time -- just when people who feed the rest of Washington are using the most fuel! Only three states zing farmers this way -- and I'm tired of Washington being one of them.

I have also sponsored a bill that gives a tax break for farmers who have to buy replacement parts and services for their machinery and equipment. This legislation is also aimed at providing some decent assistance for the men and women who help put food on Washington's table. Farmers would also be exempt from the sales tax on the purchase of used farm machinery and equipment that is used in the growing, raising and producing of agricultural products. The bill has received a public hearing in the House, and I'm optimistic that we'll get it to the Senate soon.

Increasing our access to a higher education

Today, more and more folks need to go back to school. It's easy when you're 19 -- just pack up your car and drive off to WSU, Central or Western. But people with jobs and kids can't just pick up and move into the college dorms. They need a university within driving distance.

That's why I'm supporting legislation to bring a four-year university to the Tri-Cities.

If this bill passes, the WSU Tri-Cities branch campus will begin offering lower division programs in fields determined as being high-need in southeastern Washington -- things like engineering, technology, biomedical sciences, and alternative energy. The idea is to teach local people the skills they need to get the local jobs.

Having a university nearby is a job-maker, and I hope we can get it done this year.

Getting local products to new markets

The Walla Walla RailEx initiative to ship local produce non-stop to the east coast is one of my top priorities. I will push for funding to build rail tracks connecting RailEx's distribution facility to the mainline.

This project will employ about 100 people the first year, and maybe 200 in the future. About 165 produce trucks a week will unload fresh fruit and vegetables onto the weekly Union Pacific train headed to Albany, New York. At full capacity, up to 416 million pounds of Washington produce will reach the east coast each year. That's real economic development, real jobs, and real local income.

The first step took place last July when the Washington State Community Economic Revitalization Board approved \$1 million--an \$800,000 loan and a \$200,000 grant--to build an access route to the proposed site. Now the RailEx company is working with the Port of Walla Walla and building a \$14 million, 200,000-square-foot warehouse. Union Pacific Railroad has joined in the partnership by committing 110 new refrigerated box cars and locomotive power to haul the produce.

We'll finish the job and get Washington apples, onions, potatoes and other produce heading east by refrigerated train as soon as possible.